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ABSTRACT

Successful transition from trainee status to worker status has been shown to be dependent on three factors: adequate skill training, adequate placement opportunities, and appropriate Job Readiness Posture (JRP). The Vocational Opinion Index Transition System (VOITS) was designed to help trainees develop appropriate Job Readiness Posture during skills training. The Transition System uses the VOI to diagnose an individual's JRP areas of concern and to prescribe and implement remedial activities. VOITS was implemented on a pilot basis at four MDT Centers. Results of the pilot implementation indicate the positive impact of the VOITS on center operation and staff effectiveness. (Author)

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JOB READINESS POSTURE SCALES: A NEW TOOL TO AID IN TRANSITION FROM ENROLLEE TO WORKER STATUS*

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Abstract

An individual's successful transition from trainee status to worker status is dependent on three factors: (1) adequate vocational skill training; (2) adequate placement opportunities; and (3) appropriate job readiness posture. The Vocational Opinion Index (VOI) was developed to measure the adequacy of an individual's Job Readiness Posture (JRP) for Transition to Work.

The objectives of this study were to determine if the VOI could also be used to determine those aspects of an individual's JRP that were unlike a worker's JRP and to develop remedial situations which would provide a set of learning experiences for a person with a non-worker JRP to develop a worker JRP.

Objective

The study reported here is the most recent in a series of Transition to Work studies. The objective of this study was the development of the diagnostic and remedial capabilities of the Vocational Opinion Index (VOI), an instrument designed to measure an individual's Job Readiness Posture. A diagnostic and remediation system based on the use of the VOI would provide individuals who do not have worker JRP's upon entry into a skills training program with appropriate training modules designed to help them develop worker JRP's.

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Background

During the past several years, the authors have been involved in the development and implementation of a variety of training programs for the disadvantaged. Frequently faced with the problem of skilled trainees' reticence to take a job, they have concentrated on understanding the factors facilitating or inhibiting the Transition of a successful trainee from training status to work status.

Successful Transition from training status to work status is dependent on three factors: (1) vocational skill; (2) placement opportunities; and (3) attitude, expectations and aspirations relating to work or what the authors have come to call the "Job Readiness Posture." Prior to this series of studies, it was impossible to determine which of the above factors was deficient in the case of skill program trainees who failed to gain or maintain employment. One could not say whether a program just wasn't doing the job in terms of skill training and/or placement or whether the problems were attributable to negative Job Readiness Posture factors which were preventing successful Transition. In order to determine which factor(s) was deficient, it was necessary to be able to reliably measure each factor. The need to measure these factors resulted in the development of the VOI, an instrument designed to measure an individual's JRP. Measures of a trainee's vocational skill attainment and the adequacy of placement services were already available.

The VOI measures a trainee's perception of the Attractions, Losses, and Barriers associated with attaining and maintaining a job. The instrument was developed expressly for the disadvantaged population and is particularly applicable to individuals enrolled in (or graduated from) MDT training programs. A multidiscriminant analysis of VOI data from over 4,000 individuals showed that workers and non-workers have significantly different VOI profiles, and that a person's work status can be reliably and validly predicted from his VOI responses.

The VOI also showed that except in very specific training situations, an individual's JRP does not change as a function of time in a training program. Detailed analyses of training situations where a change in the JRP was found indicated that they all had one thing in common, i.e., a large segment of the time the enrollee spent in the training program was spent in situ or in the actual work environment. These findings were discussed with training center personnel in an effort to determine the differences between classroom and in situ training. However, the training center personnel did not perceive any major differences between the in situ training and the more classic classroom training situation. They felt that all training programs were directing their efforts towards an individual attaining a vocational skill and not towards the development of appropriate Job Readiness Posture skills (i.e., attitudes, motivations, and perceptions). Time and money constraints were often cited as reasons for limiting the training focus to only vocational skills.

These findings suggested that the skills training programs might positively influence a change in an individual's JRP if the training were designed to resemble in situ training. Secondly, the in situ simulation conditions must be developed without extensive additional effort so that center staff could integrate them into their existing training systems. The following sections describe the development and implementation of a JRP skills program.

Method

The Transition to Work II study demonstrated the VOI's ability to predict future work status for MDTA enrollees. The next step was to determine

if an individual's JRP profile could be used as a diagnostic tool to help the enrollee develop a worker JRP. Using the initial factor analyses and subsequent cluster analyses, 11 specific areas of concern and 3 overall areas of concern were isolated (see Figure 1). Each of the areas of concern was related to one of the three basic psychological constructs (i.e., Attraction, Loss or Barrier). The Attraction and Loss areas of concern were considered to be bi-directional, that is, the non-worker's perception of the specific area when compared to a worker's was either too high or too low. For example, an individual might perceive the positive change in life style resulting from getting a job as being too high. If an individual anticipates too great a positive change in life style upon going to work, the cognitive dissonance between expectation and reality might cause the person to quit his job. Therefore, the goal of the remedial schema would be to provide that individual with a more realistic perception of what benefits working provides and more specifically, in this instance, what working can mean with regard to potential changes in life style. Likewise, with a bi-directional area of concern, the individual might perceive the change in life style resulting from getting a job as being too low. In this case, the person probably lacks the motivation to seek a job. Again, the goal of a remedial schema would be to provide the individual a more realistic perception of the benefits of working. However, in this instance there should be an emphasis on potential positive life style changes. The Barrier areas of concern were not bi-directional but rather existent or non-existent. For example, if a person had a medical barrier, the remedial schema would be to solve the medical barrier by direct referral to a medical service, by referral to another agency with access to necessary services, by placement in a job where the medical problem is not a barrier or some other

VOCATIONAL OPINION INDEX

AREAS OF CONCERN

Attractions

- Overall
- Benefits to Children
- Benefits to Worker
- Better Life Style
- Independence

Losses

- Overall
- Personal Freedom
- Time to Care for and be with Family

Barriers

- Overall
- Medical
- Child Care and Family
- New Situations and People
- Ability to Get and Hold a Job
- Transportation

appropriate action. If the person did not have a medical barrier, the subject would not be addressed. Appropriate exemplar remedial schema were developed for each area of concern so that training center staff would learn to understand the diagnostics and to develop the remedial prescriptions.

The data indicating that the in situ training situations had a powerful effect on enrollees' JRP's, even though the staff of the training centers reported doing nothing different for these students, led to an effort to also develop guidelines for generating prescriptive situations within the skill training components without significantly modifying the skills training program. The objective of the prescriptive situations was to provide the enrollees with an opportunity to develop a realistic frame of reference regarding the world of work. The most important aspect of the prescriptive situations was that they were developed to be implemented in an informal idiosyncratic fashion during the length of the program rather than in a scheduled formalized program, e.g., a half hour lecture every Thursday. The prescriptions were infused into the normal classroom or laboratory situation based on a situation developing in the environment. For example, someone returning from a job interview and relating a specific of the interview could easily be a stimulus for the group to develop a role playing situation on how to act in an interview. At the same time, group discussion could start on what that job could really have provided by using a blackboard to look at the pros and cons of that specific employment situation (i.e., teach the students how to evaluate a job offer).

Four MDTA skills training centers were selected as pilot implementation sites for this project. At each center a small group of counselors, skill instructors and job developers/placement personnel were selected by the

center director for VOI training. The training consisted of a detailed explanation of the conceptual framework underlying the VOI, the interpretation of each of the areas of concern and a general set of guidelines on how to engineer situations within either a classroom or counseling setting to permit each area of concern to be addressed in a number of different ways and to provide the enrollees with an opportunity to develop a realistic frame of reference regarding the world of work.

To date, each of the four centers has established a unit to implement the VOI system called a facilitative team -- a name given it by the first center and subsequently used by the others. The facilitative teams at each of the four sites have slightly different configurations in terms of personnel at each center. In some cases, a counselor has assumed leadership for the team; in others, a skill instructor has assumed leadership. The specific prescriptions that have been developed vary greatly from team to team within each center, as well as, from center to center.

Results

The major finding to date has been that each member of the facilitative team (i.e., counselor, skill instructor, and placement person) has developed a deeper understanding and appreciation for the roles of the other members of the team with regard to helping the enrollee reach the goal of obtaining and maintaining a job. In fact, one of the more frequently heard comments from people on the team and from center administrators is that for the first time each of the three functions is looking at its role and obligations as a part of an overall function rather than as a totally independent unit. The sharing of data regarding the student and the questioning of how the actions of each facilitative team member relate to other team members' actions have developed at all centers. For the first time, the VOI is permitting

the team to focus on and solve student problems before they reach crisis dimensions and cause a student to drop out of training and/or a job.

Implications

The VOI provides training center personnel with an additional means of determining what an individual needs to successfully obtain and maintain a job at the completion of a skills training program. The robustness of the VOI across a wide range of occupations, ethnic/racial groups, and geographic and educational characteristics suggests that the JRP is an important variable in a person obtaining and maintaining a job and needs to be addressed during training.

The next question that must be addressed is where, when and how should the public education system of the U. S. address the problem of developing worker JRP's before students drop out only later to turn to remedial training programs such as MDTA, CEP and WIN.